

I have not used AI in this assignment.

Contents page:

1. Part 2 A
2. Part 2 B
3. Reference List

My John Muir Award Journey

Part 2, A

Today I'm going to talk about my experience completing the John Muir award at Pen y Fan.

During this project, I explored one of the highest mountains in southern Britain while learning about its wildlife, landscape, history and the importance of protecting it. I'll explain what I discovered, how I helped conserve the area, and how this experience improved my understanding of sustainability.

Pen y Fan is the highest mountain in Bannau Brycheiniog national park, standing at 886 metres above sea level.

It is a popular destination for walkers because of its amazing views across South Wales. The mountain is made up of sandstone that was formed over 400 million years ago. It is also home to a range of wildlife and rare habitats, making it an important place for conservation.

When I visited, I could see how different the environment became as I climbed higher, with fewer trees and more open grassland and moorland.

During my visit, I discovered that Pen y Fan is much more than just a mountain.

I observed:

- Heather and upland grasses
- Mosses and lichens growing on rocks
- Birds such as ravens and red kites
- Sheep grazing across the hillsides

I also learned that the weather could change very quickly on the mountain. This creates challenging conditions for both wildlife and visitors, making preparation and safety very important.

Another thing I discovered was how many people visit Pen y Fan every year. While tourism helps the local economy, it can also damage paths and habitats if people don't follow responsible walking practices.

As part of my John Muir award, I researched the environment around Pen y Fan.

I found out that the mountain supports important upland habitats that provide homes for many different species. These habitats are sensitive and can easily be damaged by erosion, litter and people walking off designated paths.

I also learned about the effects of climate change. Rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns can affect wildlife, increase erosion and change the vegetation growing on the mountain.

Finally, I discovered why national parks are important. They protect wildlife, preserve beautiful landscapes and encourage people to enjoy nature responsibly.

During my project, I helped conserve the area by:

- Picking up litter with my family.
- Staying on marked footpaths to reduce erosion.
- Respecting wildlife by keeping noise to a minimum.
- Following the countryside code by leaving no trace after my visit.

These actions may seem small, but when thousands of visitors do the same, they make a big difference in protecting the landscape.

I also encouraged friends and family to respect the environment whenever they visit natural places.

This experience really changed the way I think about sustainability.

Before completing my John Muir award, I understood that protecting nature was important, but I didn't fully appreciate how easily natural environments can be damaged.

Visiting Pen y Fan showed me that every visitor has a responsibility to care for the landscape. Simple actions such as taking litter home, staying on paths and respecting wildlife help protect the environment for future generations.

I also realised that sustainability isn't only about protecting wildlife. It is about balancing tourism, conservation and the needs of local communities so everyone can continue to enjoy these places without causing long-term damage.

This experience has made me more environmentally aware, and I now think more carefully about the choices I make outdoors and in everyday life.

Overall, my visit to Pen y Fan was a valuable experience.

I discovered more about the mountain's wildlife, habitats and history. I learned why conservation is essential and how small individual actions can contribute to protecting the environment.

Completing the John Muir award has given me a greater appreciation of nature and has strengthened my understanding of sustainability. It has shown me that everyone has a role to play in caring for our natural world.

Part 2, B

Education for sustainability in early childhood extends beyond teaching children about nature. It aims to develop values, attitudes and behaviours that support environmental stewardship, social justice and economic responsibility while empowering children to become active citizens Davis (2015). Experiences such as those undertaken through the John Muir award provide opportunities for experiential, outdoor learning that can support these aims. However, these experiences also require critical evaluation to determine whether they fully address the broader principles of sustainability education.

One of the strongest links between the John Muir award and early childhood pedagogy is its emphasis on experiential learning. The award encourages participants to discover, explore, conserve and share experiences in natural environments. Rather than learning about sustainability through classroom instruction alone, learners actively engage with real-world environmental issues.

This closely reflects the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Dewey (1938) argued that meaningful education occurs through direct experience and reflection rather than passive acquisition of knowledge. Learning becomes more meaningful when children investigate real situations that connect with everyday life.

Similarly, Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory proposes that learning follows a cycle of, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.

During activities such as habitat surveys, litter collection, woodland exploration or conservation work, participants experience each stage of Kolb's cycle. They observe nature, reflect upon environmental issues and apply new understanding through practical conservation.

Research supports this approach. Ernst and Monroe (2004) found that environmental education programmes involving active participation significantly improve environmental awareness and stewardship compared with classroom-based learning alone. Nature-based learning is another central feature of both the John Muir award and education for sustainability. Friedrich Froebel viewed nature as children's first teacher. He believed that outdoor exploration develops curiosity,

observation and holistic understanding of the world Bruce (2021). Rather than separating learning into subjects, Froebel believed children should learn through interaction with natural materials and living systems.

The John Muir award reflects these ideas by encouraging learners to spend sustained time in natural environments. Likewise, Rudolf Steiner argued that regular contact with nature supports children's emotional wellbeing, imagination and moral development Nicol and Taplin (2012). Activities involving woodland walks, wildlife observation and seasonal change encourage children to develop wonder and respect for the natural world. Research consistently demonstrates benefits of outdoor learning. Gill (2014) found that regular outdoor experiences improve, confidence, resilience, physical health, emotional wellbeing, and problem-solving skills. Similarly, Chawla (2020) argues that repeated positive experiences in nature during childhood increase the likelihood of pro-environmental behaviours in adulthood. Modern sustainability education increasingly argues that humans should be viewed as part of ecological systems rather than separate from nature. This aligns with posthumanist perspectives and the work of scholars such as Malone (2016), who argues that children develop environmental responsibility through relationships with animals, plants and ecosystems rather than solely through scientific knowledge.

The John Muir award encourages participants to observe wildlife, understand habitats and recognise the interconnectedness of ecosystems. These experiences support what Davis and Elliott (2014) describe as ecological identity the understanding that human wellbeing depends upon healthy natural systems. A further strength of the John Muir award is the development of sense of place. Sense of place refers to emotional attachment and belonging to local environments Sobel (2004). Young children learn most effectively through familiar places. Exploring local woodlands, rivers, parks and coastlines helps children understand that sustainability begins within their own communities. Gruenewald (2003) argues that place-based education strengthens environmental responsibility because learners value places they know personally. For example, repeated visits to the same woodland allow children to observe seasonal change, biodiversity and human impact over time. Education for sustainable development places considerable emphasis on critical thinking, creativity and reflection. UNESCO (2020) identifies key competencies for

sustainability, including critical thinking, systems thinking, anticipatory thinking, collaboration, self-awareness, and reflective learning. The John Muir award includes opportunities for reflection through journals, photography, artwork and discussion.

Reflection enables participants to consider questions such as, how has this environment changed, what human activities affect biodiversity, and what actions could improve this place. Creative responses also encourage emotional engagement. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) argue that sustainability education should encourage multiple ways of thinking rather than promoting fixed answers. Education for sustainability requires learners to move beyond knowledge acquisition towards meaningful action.

The John Muir award explicitly includes conservation activity. Examples include litter picking, habitat restoration, tree planting, wildlife surveys, and improving public access to green spaces. This reflects the action competence model proposed by Jensen and Schnack (1997), who argue that sustainability education should empower learners to take informed action rather than simply increasing environmental knowledge. Children experience themselves as capable of making positive environmental change. Research by Barrable and Booth (2020) suggests that active participation in conservation projects increases children's sense of environmental responsibility and optimism. The John Muir award closely aligns with Welsh sustainability policy.

The well-being of future generations (Wales) Act 2015 encourages organisations and educational settings to improve social, environmental, cultural and economic wellbeing for future generations. The award particularly contributes towards several wellbeing goals, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a globally responsible Wales. The practical conservation activities also support curriculum for Wales by encouraging, ethical, informed citizens, healthy, confident individuals, ambitious capable learners. The John Muir award contributes to several UN sustainable development goals United Nations (2015). Most directly quality education, through experiential learning and sustainability education, climate action, through increased understanding of environmental issues. Life on land, through biodiversity conservation and habitat

protection. Activities promoting wellbeing outdoors also contribute towards good health and wellbeing. Although the John Muir award has many strengths, it is not without limitations. A significant criticism concerns the balance between the three pillars of sustainable development.

UNESCO defines sustainability as encompassing, environmental, social, economic and dimensions. The John Muir award predominantly focuses upon environmental conservation. There is comparatively limited exploration of poverty, inequality, social justice, ethical consumption, global citizenship and economic sustainability. Davis (2015) argues that effective sustainability education should encourage children to understand relationships between environmental degradation and wider issues such as inequality and resource distribution.

Education for sustainable development and global citizenship emphasises social justice, diversity, human rights and democratic participation. While the John Muir award promotes community engagement and volunteering, these aspects are often secondary to environmental objectives. Andreotti (2006) argues that global citizenship education should challenge learners to consider power, inequality and multiple perspectives. Many John Muir award activities remain locally focused.

Another challenge concerns access. Not all children have equal opportunities to participate in outdoor education. Barriers include transport, disability, funding, weather and availability of green spaces.

Children living in urban or disadvantaged communities may have reduced access to high-quality natural environments. Knight (2013) argues that outdoor learning should be inclusive and accessible to all children. Research suggests outdoor experiences alone do not automatically produce sustainability learning. Davis and Elliott (2014) argue that educators play a critical role in facilitating questioning, dialogue and reflection.

Without skilled teaching, activities risk becoming enjoyable outdoor experiences rather than opportunities for critical sustainability education. Practitioners must encourage children to ask questions, solve problems collaboratively and consider different viewpoints.

Overall, the John Muir award strongly supports the philosophy and principles of early childhood education for sustainability through experiential learning, outdoor education, reflection, conservation and developing emotional connections with nature. Its principles closely reflect the educational philosophies of Dewey, Froebel and Steiner while aligning with Welsh policy frameworks, curriculum for Wales and several United Nations sustainable development goals.

However, critical evaluation suggests that the award places greater emphasis on environmental sustainability than on the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. To fully meet the aims of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, educators should supplement John Muir experiences with learning that explores social justice, equity, cultural diversity and global interdependence.

Ultimately, the educational value of the John Muir award depends not only on outdoor experiences themselves but on how practitioners facilitate reflection, critical thinking and meaningful action for a more sustainable future.

Reference List

- Andreotti, V. (2006) *Soft versus critical global citizenship education*. Policy and Practice, 3, pp. 40–51.
- Barrable, A. and Booth, D. (2020) *Nature connection in early childhood: A quantitative cross-sectional study*. Sustainability, 12(1), pp. 1–16.
- Bruce, T. (2021) *Early Childhood Education*. 6th edn. London: Hodder Education.
- Chawla, L. (2020) *Childhood nature connection and constructive hope*. People and Nature, 2(3), pp. 619–642.
- Dahlberg, G. and Moss, P. (2005) *Ethics and Politics in Early Childhood Education*. London: Routledge.
- Davis, J. (2015) *Young Children and the Environment*. 2nd edn. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, J. and Elliott, S. (2014) *Research in Early Childhood Education for Sustainability*. London: Routledge.
- Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Ernst, J. and Monroe, M. (2004) *The effects of environment-based education on students' critical thinking skills and disposition toward critical thinking*. Environmental Education Research, 10(4), pp. 507–522.
- Gill, T. (2014) *The Benefits of Children's Engagement with Nature*. Children, Youth and Environments, 24(2), pp. 10–34.
- Gruenewald, D. (2003) *The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place*. Educational Researcher, 32(4), pp. 3–12.
- Jensen, B.B. and Schnack, K. (1997) *The action competence approach in environmental education*. Environmental Education Research, 3(2), pp. 163–178.
- Knight, S. (2013) *Forest School and Outdoor Learning in the Early Years*. 2nd edn. London: Sage.
- Kolb, D.A. (1984) *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Malone, K. (2016) *Children in the Anthropocene*. In: Cutter-Mackenzie, A. et al. (eds.) *Research Handbook on Childhood nature*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Nicol, J. and Taplin, J. (2012) *Understanding the Steiner Waldorf Approach*. London: Routledge.
- Sobel, D. (2004) *Place-Based Education*. Great Barrington: Orion Society.

UNESCO (2020) *Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap*. Paris: UNESCO.

United Nations. (2015) *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. (2015) *Anaw 2*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.